

98-84325-28

Russell, Charles Edward

The increased cost of
living

New York

[1911?]

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v.101 Russell, Charles Edward, 1860-1941
The increased cost of living. [New York, Social-
ist party of New York County, 1911?]
6 p. 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm in 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm.
Caption title. Volume of pamphlets
Only Ed

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mmREDUCTION RATIO: 11:1IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA ☒ IB ☐ IIBDATE FILMED: 2/4/98INITIALS: F.C.TRACKING # : 30402

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THE INCREASED COST OF LIVING

CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL

Every year the cost of living increases in this country.

Every year the prices of food, clothing and shelter increase, but as a rule wages and salaries do not increase in any such proportion as the cost of living.

This means that every year the American workingman has less to show for his labor.

They do the same amount of work. As a rule they get about the same wages or not much more, and every year their wages will buy less of the things they need to sustain life.

This is practically the same thing as an annual reduction of wages, because every year their wages will buy less than they previously would buy.

This certain fact has been admitted in the debates in Congress.

What Bradstreet's Shows.

Bradstreets, a journal devoted to prices and business, prints this showing of the changes in wholesale prices for fifteen years:

COMPARISON OF WHOLESALE PRICES.

	1896	1910
Flour, straight winter, barrel.....	\$3.25	\$5.55
Beef, carcasses at Chicago, lb.....	.055	.095
Hogs, carcasses at Chicago, lb.....	.038	.1225
Mutton, carcasses at Chicago, lb.....	.055	.1250
Milk, at New York, quart.....	.03	.045
Eggs, fresh at New York, dozen.....	.125	.25
Beef, family, barrel.....	8.50	18.00
Pork, new mess, barrel.....	8.25	26.00
Bacon, smoked, Chicago, lb.....	.043	.14
Hams, smoked, lb.....	.10	.15
Lard, Western, steam, lb.....	.042	.137
Butter, creamery, lb.....	.15	.33
Cheese, choice factory, lb.....	.066	.175
Codfish, dried, quintal.....	4.00	7.00
Salt, fine domestic, sack.....	.75	1.00
Beans, bushel.....	1.15	2.95
Peas, choice, bushel.....	1.05	2.25
Potatoes, Eastern, 180 lbs.....	.75	1.37
Standard sheetings, yard.....	.0537	.08
Ginghams, yard.....	.05	.07

To this list other investigators add the following increases:

Cost of building....	45 per cent	Woolens	120 per cent
Cotton	115 per cent	Shoes	35 per cent.

The following comparison of prices is made from market reports:

	1900	1910		1900	1910
Bacon, by the pound....	.12	.36	Lamb, by the pound..	.12	.28
Sirloin steak, by the pound	.22	.33	Veal, by the pound..	.15	.28
Round steak, by the pound	.12	.20	Mutton(leg) by the lb.	.10	.24

Comparisons for a shorter period are afforded from this table:

	1905	1910		1905	1910
Flour, by the barrel \$4.13	\$5.70	Coffee, by the pound	.16—	.28	.38
Butter, by the pound	.26	.32	Potatoes, by the bus.	.50	.65
Bacon, by the pound,	.15	.25			

WHAT CAUSES IT?

At last this condition, steadily growing everywhere, forces itself upon the general attention even of the well-fed and fortunate. The newspapers take it up and discuss it. Statesmen deplore its evil consequences. Congress splutters and fumbles over it. Many investigators consider its causes. Eminent persons set forth its remedies.

Here are some of the causes ascribed:

1. It is the tariff.

P. S.—But we have had the tariff forty-seven years and we had it when prices were less than half of the prices of today.

Maybe it's the Retail Butcher and Grocer.

2. It is the greed of the retailer. The butcher and grocer pile on the prices and make the rest of us suffer for the sake of their fortunes.

P. S.—But inquiry shows that the butcher and the grocer are making no greater profits than they made before and are themselves complaining of high prices.

Blaming the Farmer.

3. It is the terrible farmer. That avaricious person has put up the prices of cattle and of corn and of hogs and naturally the prices of other things must rise in consequence. Shoes which are (sometimes) made of leather; and bacon, of course, and spare ribs; and round steak; and butter, which is made of milk (more or less).

P. S.—But inquiry shows that the terrible farmer is not on the way to be a multi-millionaire, is not growing rapidly rich, is not aware that he is running the nation, but in most instances is, like the rest of us, complaining of his enforced expenses.

Is it the Housewife?

4. It is the American housewife. She does not know how to economize. Now a housewife in Herzegovina, Hungary, can make twenty-eight different kinds of dishes out of an old bone that the American housewife merely throws into the soup. There lies all the trouble. Let the American housewife learn to cook bones.

P. S.—But reflection shows that the American housewife knew ten years ago as little about bones as she knows today, although ten years ago there was none of this universal trouble about the cost of living.

We are too Extravagant.

5. It is the luxurious and extravagant habits of the American nation, manicuring its finger nails, taking Turkish baths, going to the opera and buying automobiles.

P. S.—But on reflection no one can say exactly why the use of a manicure set should influence the price of mess beef. And as for opera and automobiles, the total number of Americans that enjoy these luxuries is so infinitely small, compared with the number that do not, that this sort of reasoning doesn't seem to go very far except as an excellent element of comedy.

The Terrible Labor Unions.

6. It is the terrible labor union. This institution, always pernicious in the eyes of Capitalism, has raised the price of labor and of course anybody can see the necessary consequences. Cost of labor increased, cost of production increased; prices of articles must be increased. That is what does it all—the depraved labor union.

P. S.—But as a matter of fact only about 1,000,000 workers are enrolled in the labor unions. Many of these have not had their wages increased at all, and for those that have managed to get more pay, the increase has averaged, it is said, about 12 per cent, while the average cost of living has increased more than 60 per cent.

Stop Eating Meat!

7. It is the eating of meat. If we refuse to eat meat the problem is solved because the price must decline. Let us then pledge ourselves not to eat meat for sixty days.

P. S.—But it doesn't appear from this what is to be done after the sixty days, and anyway, after some thousands have lent themselves to this sapient theory, the prices of meat continue to rise as before.

On the Trail of the Packers.

8. It is the packers. Those lawless persons in Chicago have

combined to advance the prices of meat. There is where all the trouble lies. Let us swat the packers. So an Eminent Person in Washington announces that he will prosecute to the bitter end these dreadful malefactors, and an Eminent Person in Chicago announces that he will prosecute them, too. Then the Eminent Person in Chicago says he thought of prosecution first and the Eminent Person in Washington says he thought of it first; and between the two it is evident that something is to happen and the atrocious packers actually may be obliged to hire lawyers that will appear in court and defend them from something or other.

P. S.—But it will take, if the Eminent Persons persevere, about six years to determine whether the depraved packers are really guilty of anything. How, in the meantime, prices are to be reduced or kept from rising day by day no one has explained—not even the Eminent Person

Some Remedies Proposed.

For the situation created by the increased cost of living these remedies are commonly proposed:

1. Reduce the tariff.
2. Practice the boycott and refuse to buy some of the things we need.
3. Put men into jail.
4. Enforce certain ridiculous, absurd and mediaeval laws now on the statute book, laws that forbid evolution and progress, such as the Sherman anti-trust law.

Look in turn at each of these remedies.

In the first place no good can come of tinkering with the tariff. The Interests will not allow any but very slight changes in the tariff duties and all the changes that Congress can make will not make food cheap nor reduce rents. To reduce the tariff on wool from 70 per cent to 68 per cent cannot make bacon cheap nor steak nor sheetings nor calico.

In the next place the boycott is absolutely illegal, and having been so declared by the highest courts is likely to land its practitioners in jail. If you cannot boycott stoves you cannot boycott sausages; that is certain. But laying aside this consideration, it is obvious that we can, by refusing to eat, achieve nothing except that, if we persevere long enough, we may work a considerable injury upon ourselves. The substance of this remedy, then, is that we make laws, the corporations violate them, and we punish the corporations by starving ourselves.

Putting People into Jail.

As for putting people into jail, suppose, for the sake of example, we were to seize the three persons at the head of the great packing houses of Chicago and imprison them for life. Suppose we were to put into jail with them all the managers, sub-managers, superintendents, clerks and foremen. How on

earth would that reduce the price of meat? It might possibly increase the price, because, for a time, it might make production more difficult; but it could never reduce the price. The great Armour establishment would have to go on if Mr. Armour were in jail; the great Swift establishment and the great Morris establishment could not stop if all the Swifts and Morrises in the world were locked up. They would go on and go on exactly as they go now, and the prices they charged would be then, as now, independent of the will of any man, and produced by great economic causes.

Breaking up the Trusts.

As for legal war upon business organizations, as for dosing them with dear old Dr. Sherman's Anti-Trust Herb Tea, as for attacking them with ancient statutes, we had much better spare ourselves the labor. We have an order now from one of the lower federal courts commanding the Standard Oil Company to dissolve itself, break up its amalgamated units and return to the condition of sixteenth century competition. Let us suppose this order to be sustained by the Supreme Court and enforced. Of course it never will be, but let us strain our imaginations to the utmost and suppose that it is and that all the trusts are ordered to dissolve themselves and return to the abandoned practices. That is, I believe, what the eminent trust doctors want—Dr. Roosevelt, Dr. Bryan, Dr. Taft and the rest. Let us suppose that they have their own way in every particular and that these pernicious trusts (held to be responsible for the increased cost of living) are broken up, dissolved, annihilated and made to cease from being in the world of men. What then?

Why, then, as these combinations were the result of evolution and the law of industrial development and were not in any way nor to any degree the work or design of individuals, the same irresistible law would compel them to again reform themselves into other combinations and proceed as before to supply man with the thing that he needs exactly as if the Sherman law had never been heard of.

Let us be Reasonable.

But suppose that instead of fooling any longer with laws that deny evolution and progress and therefore cannot be enforced, suppose we be reasonable and put ourselves in line with evolution instead of opposing it.

The only reason why the Trust works harm is because it is owned and operated for the benefit of a few individuals instead of for the benefit of the nation.

Suppose, for instance, the United States of America owned the Railroad Trust and operated the railroads not to earn interest and dividends on fraudulent capital but to transport freight and passengers at cost.

That would make a great difference, would it not?

Suppose the Beef Trust were owned by the public and operated not to secure interest and dividends on watered stock but to supply absolutely wholesome meat at cost.

That would make a difference.

Suppose the Coal Trust to be owned by the nation and operated not to pile up colossal fortunes for seven men but to supply coal at cost.

Surely that would make a great difference.

Wouldn't this make a Difference?

Suppose all these trusts, now operated to secure interest and dividends on watered stock and fictitious bonds—on a total capitalization of four times the amount of the investment—suppose all of these were owned by the public and operated for the benefit of the public.

Surely that would make the greatest possible difference, would it not?

The Socialist Proposition.

But suppose we change the present basis by putting the ownership in the hands of the nation as a whole to the end that the food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other necessities of the people be supplied at cost without paying tribute to private capitalists. To get first consideration the people of the nation must own industry—the railroads, the mines, the factories—and operate them in their own interest.

We cannot bust the trusts. That is impossible. We must own the trusts. That is what Socialism proposes to do. That is what the Socialist party is organized to do. It is the only remedy for high prices that can ever achieve any result.

THINK IT OVER.



¶ Charles Edward Russell, the author of the foregoing folder, is admitted to be one of America's greatest magazine writers. His life has been devoted to a study of the causes that make it possible for a comparatively few capitalists to hold at their mercy and bleed an entire nation of wealth producers. ¶ This folder is issued by the Socialist Party of New York County. The headquarters are at 239 East 84th Street, adjoining the Labor Temple. The organizer, Edward F. Cassidy, will furnish further information. The Socialist Party issues a daily newspaper, "The Call," which is published at 409 Pearl Street and stands unflinchingly in the interest of the man who works as against the interests of the man who lives on the sweat of the man who works.

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